

SPOTLIGHT

Natural dyes:

For the fashionably ethical

As you browse through endless stores to pick the trendiest attires, or when you give yourself a bit of a shopping therapy, does the question of environmental friendliness come to your mind? It should!

The fashion industry has its share of sins in terms of causing negative environmental impact. The use of synthetic dyes, for example, has been known to harm the environment.

Therefore, for the ethical consumer, one way of reducing environmental impact is by wearing or buying clothes which uses natural dyes instead of artificial ones. Wearing natural is a brilliant idea to do your bit for Planet Earth.

Natural dyes, simply put, are those which are derived from natural sources. Onions, pomegranate, and indigo are just three examples of plant-based sources.

"From the process of extraction of the natural dye to its application to the fabrics, there are many measured and careful steps to follow," said Mishael Aziz Ahmad of Living Blue, a fashion brand which thrives on its high craftsmanship. "For indigo, you have to cultivate the plants, and cut it at the right time of the season. It then goes into a series of stages, such as fermentation, oxidisation, and sun-drying."

Ahmad says that it is a characteristic of natural dye that the fabric may lose colour or fade to a certain extent over time, and hence, precautions such as avoiding washing these fabrics in hot water are recommended.

"The risk can be minimised to a large extent by buying from credible brands which take quality control seriously and put efforts to carefully monitor all the production steps," he added.

There are a few fashion stores in Bangladesh which sells attires that use natural colours. Aranya, for example, is a reputable name which upholds the use of natural dyes.

Being in business for decades, its brand has become synonymous with heritage and elegance.

On the other hand, Living Blue does not have any official presence for potential consumers in our country – at the moment.

Ahmad informed that this will change soon. "In a couple of months or so, we are launching an online store, from where, customers will be able to purchase our products," he said.

But until that, it may be worthwhile to note that the label has made its way into many premium outlets overseas and has also made its mark in a number of highly prestigious events like Maison d'Exceptions and Paris Fashion Week.

There are numerous colours based on natural dyes; the options are numerous.

"Sometimes, more than one natural dye is used for a fabric. This process provides even more shades and colours,"

Ahmad explained.

Meanwhile, many people may have the perception that attires where natural dyes have been used are all dull.

Ahmad disagrees: in look and feel, natural dyes actually provide immense lustre and depth, he says.

So, what's to be done? "You may not be able to entirely get rid of artificial colours right away," Ahmad says. "But we should also increase the use of natural dye."

Buying natural, after all, is an ethical consumer's decision we ought to consider.

By M H Haider

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